



Growing up in Cleveland as a die-hard sports fan is not an easy thing to do. We live and die with these teams. We've been so close, especially in the 1997 World Series, yet the story always has a sad ending. We've come to expect failure, and for good reason.

Sadly, as Clevelanders, the memories that tend to stick around are the bad ones. We don't tend to hold onto the great joys our beloved teams have given us. Over my next couple of articles, I will attempt to tell the story of the two greatest games I have ever seen live, and in person.

It was back in early October 1996 that I decided to attend the first ever post-season game of my life. The Indians were playing the Orioles in the Divisional Series and were coming home down 2-0 in the best of five series. I don't even remember how a couple of friends and I came up with tickets. Most likely they were obtained from a fan that could not bear to see another season end before their very eyes.

Jack McDowell, who had a so-so season after signing with the Indians as a high profile free agent the winter before, started the game for the Indians. He would be facing a 19-game winner in Mike Mussina. In what was a must win game, the Tribe got out to a early lead when Kenny Lofton reached on an error, stole a base and scored on a Kevin Seitzer groundball. The Orioles answered in the top of the second when McDowell hit Brady Anderson with a pitch to force in the tying run. The Tribe answered right back with a Manny Ramirez homer to go up one, then a Jose Vizcaino double scored Omar to put us up 3-1. These two runs, followed by a 1,2,3 inning for McDowell had the Jake rocking.

Of course, we all know nothing comes easy to us Cleveland fans, and in the top of the fourth inning it got a little more difficult. After consecutive singles by Cal Ripken and Eddie Murray, B.J. Surhoff launched a three-run homer to give the Orioles the lead. Thankfully, the Indians were able to scratch a run across in the bottom of the inning to even the score at four. A few uneventful innings followed before things got really interesting.

It is now the bottom of the seventh inning and Baltimore decided it was time to switch pitchers. In came Jesse Orosco, who was 84 years old at the time I believe. He walked Lofton to start the inning. Then he walked Seitzer. First and second with nobody out, and Thome is coming up to face the tough southpaw. All

## Never Sit Down

Written by {ga=pup}

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of the sudden, we see Jim Thome get called back to the dugout and out comes....ready for this.....Casey Candaele? Really? Well, obviously he is going to bunt, then they will walk Albert Belle and it will be up to Julio Franco to provide the spark for the fans to ignite. Casey gets to the plate, squares around and pulls back and takes ball one. Cool. Now he can be more selective. Ball two. Well, Orosco will just lob it up there now, and let him bunt it. Nope, ball three. There was no way possible Orosco would walk Candaele to face Albert Belle with the bases loaded, was there? He did.

Now, as all of this is going on, a little situation was developing where we were at ... about five rows from the top of Jacobs Field. The boys and me are, lets just say, slightly inebriated, and likely raging with testosterone (we were 21 at the time). Anyway, the Jake was a little strange during the inning. Some of the fans where going nuts. Some people seemed to be wondering what bad could happen. Our section was one of the worried areas. So we did what all great Cleveland fans would do. We tried to get everyone fired up. We were yelling, screaming and jumping up and down. Next thing we know, some jerk off behind us decided we were obstructing his view. Even worse, we were bothering his wife, who clearly more bothered by the October weather and fan zest than what was going on in the game itself. Unfortunately for the idiot, he had the wrong three fans to try to settle down, and had picked the exact wrong time to try and negotiate this request.

Idiot: "Sit down."

Us: "Stand up and yell."

Idiot: "My wife won't stand she is afraid of heights."

Us: "Then why are you sitting 4 rows from the top?"

Idiot: "Sit down before I make you."

We had no plans on sitting down, and this all had time to come to a head as the Orioles made a pitching change. The bases were loaded and they were bringing Armando Benitez in to face Albert Belle!

Now it is time, Albert is stepping into the box and the rest of our section was getting loud, except for the idiot and his wife. And what does he do? He tries to grab my friend and pull him down in his chair. Normally this move would have resulted in some immediate action. But we were actually too caught up in this next pitch. Benitez went into his motion towards the plate and the crowd paused. A fastball, thigh high, middle of the plate, and Albert did what he did in the

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mid-nineties -- crushed it over the wall in left center. An absolute rocket that cleared the wall in an instant yet seemed to stay in the air forever! Jubilation at the Jake! Everyone was going crazy.

Now, what about the jerk behind us? Well, let's just say his wife got over her fear of heights awfully quick. She was jumping up and down now, hugging everyone in sight. The Husband was throwing high fives around like a maniac. As he finished high-fiving the whole row behind him, he turned our way, flashed a little "ok, I'm an asshole" smile and the high fives came flying our way. We might have even gotten a hug from the wife.

Now the Indians only had two innings to hold on and make this a game to remember forever. Eric Plunk shut Baltimore down in the eighth inning. Jose Mesa came in and closed the door in the ninth. Game three was over and the Indians had life in the series.

This was one of those games that make all of those tough losses bearable. Instead of the great wins making the losses so hard to endure, maybe we need to use those losses to make the great games that much better. There is nothing that can ever make that game, those memories, go away. Maybe, just maybe, if we start to spend more energy enjoying the victories, we will have even bigger moments to cherish.